

BOOK REVIEW

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God and the Afterlife: The Groundbreaking New Evidence for God and Near-Death Experience by Jeffrey Long with Paul Perry, New York, NY: Harper One, 2016, 218 pp., \$25.99 (ISBN 9780062279545); Kindle ed. \$12.99 e-book.

As I am now a retired applied criminal justice professional and professor of criminology, my research interests focus on “evil” and suppression of evil. I am a Christian and follow the reports of the International Association for Near-Death Studies (IANDS). Although I have not met Jeffrey Long, author of the book reviewed herein, I did review his 2010 book, *Evidence of the Afterlife: The Science of Near-Death Experiences*, in which he reported results of the scientific study that formed the basis of this 2016 book. As a social science researcher, I see his topic as the most critical one science can address. I felt I should review it and call it to the attention of other social scientists.

Long holds an MD degree and, in my view, grasps research methodology well. He has published books on the topic of near-death experiences (NDEs) and has been active in the study of them; interested readers may want to visit the website that he and his wife, Jody Long, maintain for their Near-Death Experience Research Foundation at <http://www.nderf.org/>. In his latest book, Long reported “The God Study” as evidence for the existence of God and an afterlife. He noted the absence of scientific studies of his topic. As such, I found this to be an unusually powerful research report about the very existence of God. Although more detail on the research design, data collection, and analysis would have been valuable in this book, even though it was

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covered in the 2010 book, he reported adequate methodology to qualify the study as what he claimed.

Summary of Content

In Chapter 1, Long summarized what is known empirically from the reports of near-death experiencers (NDErs) and the several types of evidence he used in support of his conclusion. Chapter 2, the essence of the research, contains a description of “The God Study,” including the limited statistical analysis provided of the 420 subjects reporting Divine interactions during their NDEs. This chapter is as close as the book came to a description of the research methodology and findings, so researchers should pay particular attention to it.

Chapters 3–5 are specifications and interpretations of the reports that subjects provided about interactions with God. Although this review cannot do justice to these chapters, a bottom line interpretation is that God is love and that human behaviors based on that conclusion are what humans should learn while in human form. Chapters 6–9 are interpretations of the subjects’ reports that described the mechanics and operationalization of what these NDErs experienced during what they considered their brief forays into an afterlife.

Chapter 10 and the conclusion section are selected descriptions Long took from the survey responses. The respondents emphasized the reality of their NDEs, and Long accepted that perception as accurate. It is important to stress: Long’s specification that the wonder of an afterlife is not a justification for suicide but, rather, a reason to complete human responsibilities.

Analysis and Evaluation

In Long’s (2010) *Evidence of the Afterlife*, he reported his scientific study of over 3,000 NDE reports registered at www.nderf.org from the website’s inception in 1998 through about 2009. I found that 2010 study methodologically adequate, indeed superb given the research question, with no apparent scientific errors. In the current book Long presented an extension of that uniquely valuable scientific study. In this book, however, his methodology was less clear. It appears that in 2011 he modified his website survey to include specific inquiry about encounters with God during NDEs. From 2011 through 2014, over 1,300 NDEs were registered at his website, and it was from this “largest collection of near-death experiences to date” (p. 196) that he

identified the 420 registrants who answered affirmatively to his query about the presence of God in their NDEs.

Putting aside for the moment the methodological uncertainties, I noted two remarkable aspects of this study. One was the description of God, new and unique in its source and elaboration, based on the subjects' definitive insistence of the reality of their interactions with God, is "love" as the foundation of all reality, including Heaven. I found the nature of the subjects' responses to be profound and Long's interpretation of them to be beyond criticism.

The second unique aspect of this book defies methodological categorization. I have never encountered a research topic and study such as this. Recall that the research began years ago. Yet, only after the first survey was completed did it occur to Long to study NDErs' reported interactions with God. I found that failure to focus on so important an aspect of the survey responses to have been peculiar. Clearly, methodologists would not normally fail to recognize such a critical aspect of the data. In any case, in 2011 the research design was apparently revised to best investigate the nature of God's interaction with subjects, and Long found the consistent theme associating God and love. I can think of only two explanations for his finding: (a) his interpretation of God is mistaken, perhaps reflecting a Freudian process whereby he unconsciously saw only what he wanted to see, or (b) his interpretation of God is valid. Personally, I find the first explanation unlikely. However, because his study was methodologically unclear and ventured into new conceptual territory, his findings call for replication. Should future research support these findings and interpretations, this book will hold an important, even historic, place in the theological literature.

Conclusion

Long's first book was a scientific study, and his second expanded specifically on the topic of what happens when humans interact in a personal way with God during an NDE. I thought Long did a good job of theological interpretation and provided a convincing argument that subjects reported their belief that the interactions were with God. Although his research design was adequate, his focus on interpretation and not scientific methodology was the focus of this book. Further work could benefit from more elaboration of the science and research design underlying the survey responses. I believe that anyone with

concern about an afterlife, including its reality and its content, will find both books to be worthwhile reading.

Reference

Long, J., with Perry, P. (2010). *Evidence of the afterlife: The science of near-death experiences*. New York, NY: HarperCollins.